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WRITERS OF THE DAY

GENERAL EDITOR: BERTRAM CHRISTIAN

J. M. BARRIE

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

ARNOLD BENNETT (*Writers of the Day*)

THE MARCHES OF WESSEX

A PARCEL OF KENT

THE LIFE AND TIMES OF MRS SHERWOOD

Etc., Etc.

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J. M. BARRIE

By
F. J. HARVEY DARTON



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“Missus was the last one I would have took to be sentimental, but we all feels it at one time or another.”—Marginal note by Caddie, in *Jane Annie* (by J. M. BARRIE and A. CONAN DOYLE).

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AUTHOR'S NOTE

AFTER I had begun this book, Mr Thomas Moult's *Barrie : a Critical Estimate* (Cape, 1928) appeared. I deemed it fair not to read it until I had carried out my own plan, for fear of unconscious plagiarism or reception of ideas. I have now done so, and have not altered a word : I finished my book before opening his. Our aims and our methods are different, but I find that, apart from some inevitable coincidences of fact and of quotation, we do accidentally agree curiously in certain views which might have been expected to be divergent. I mention this in justice to Mr Moult and to the readers of either book.

F. J. H. D.

I

“THE ELEMENTS SO MIXED”

IN the spacious days of cricket there used often to be seen in the vast wilderness of the Mound Stand at Lord's a small black lonely figure smoking a pipe. Aloof and solitary, he gazed in a sombre rapture at the white moving shapes, so steadily that he seemed to be a fixture, like the clock or the pavilion. You would not have thought that he was a Scot, for Caledonia is almost too stern and wild for cricket; that he might have, at that very moment, two or three plays running in London, and the “best-seller” of the year being clamoured for at the circulating libraries; that he was a Doctor of Laws of one great Scottish University, Rector of another, a member of the Order of Merit, and a baronet of the United Kingdom. But so it was. Sir James Matthew Barrie was, if not a cricket fan, at least a devotee. Whether he still seeks an

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eremite's ecstasy at Lord's in to-day's dreary business of oozing out huge scores I do not know. He has lately given Kirriemuir a cricket pavilion. But the game has always been a passion with him, and love of it is certainly one of the things that has made Barrie what he is—whatever that may be; which it is the purpose of this book to inquire.

Let me pursue this matter a little further, for it is both provocative and indicative. In the most successful of his early plays (*Walker, London*) one of the younger characters rejoices in the possession of a "cane-handled bat." Such a weapon is indeed a glory to a small boy, and Barrie must have known some small boy well to be aware of that fact. But the description of the bat's superb quality — its cane handle — almost dates the allusion as Victorian, for nowadays all boys capable of playing real cricket and old enough to appear in a play take a cane handle for granted.

Again, this un-Scottish addiction and knowledge had a very practical side to it.

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Barrie ran his own cricket team—the “Allahakbarries.” Their *Book of Broadway Cricket* was put forth privately in 1899, and is an almost unattainable prize for book-collectors. Apparently only two copies have been publicly seen. One—which had belonged to the late Clement Shorter—was sold at Sotheby’s, in April 1928, for £108. Few of Barrie’s works, except this, are “collector’s books,” in the technical sense; at any rate, as yet. The book, what little is known of it, is very personal, and it is fairer not to repeat even the few sentences from it that have crept into print here and there. They are in the best dry manner. The game meant to the founder of the “Allahakbarries” something more than matter for a joyous chronicle. In a well-known speech he spoke of it as perhaps only the author of *Dear Brutus* could speak: “It has been said of the unseen army of the dead, on their everlasting march, that when they are passing a rural cricket ground the Englishman falls out of the ranks for a moment to look over the gate and smile.” Many Englishmen have used

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splendid words about their own national game. But this fine simplicity is the thought of a Scot who first made the English admire him because he *is* a Scot.

He delivered that speech for several reasons : one, no doubt, being that he was asked to do so, for on his rare public appearances he has become known for his wise, humorous tongue. Another was possibly that he began his literary life as a journalist, and the occasion of the speech was a luncheon given to the Australian XI. of 1926 by the London District of the Institute of Journalists. His well-known description of his own work is a modest refusal to be called a great author. In his Rectorial Address, *Courage*, he speaks of the famous "literary Rectors" who had preceded him in his honourable office at St Andrews. "My more humble branch may be described as playing hide-and-seek with angels."

He has been engaged in that pastime long enough to have found a good many angels of one kind or another. But he does not define very clearly the difference between the

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romantic hidiers and the prosaic or practical seekers. He says so in a famous passage in the same address :

“ M‘Connachie . . . is the name I give to the unruly half of myself : the writing half. . . . My desire is to be the family solicitor, standing firm on my hearthrug among the harsh realities of the office furniture ; while M‘Connachie prefers to fly around on one wing.”

M‘Connachie plays hide-and-seek, but the family solicitor draws up the rules. The partnership sometimes breaks down.

It would be impertinent to speak of his private life, except in so far as he reveals it himself. His personal friendship with great writers and great men is well known. Stevenson, George Meredith, Scott of the South Pole, are varied enough acquaintance for any man. The close intimacy with Scott, a thing of rare beauty, has been made public. Barrie himself, in a preface to *The Voyages of Captain Scott* (Smith, Elder, 1914), a boys’ book compiled by Mr Charles Turley,

describes their first meeting. They walked away together from their host's house :

“In vain he escorted me through the streets of London to my home, for when he had said good-night I then escorted him to his, and so it went on I know not for how long through the small hours. Our talk was largely a comparison of the life of action (which he pooh-poohed) with the loathly life of those who sit at home (which I scorned).”

During his Rectorial Address he produced Scott's last letter to him, to point the moral he was expressing so splendidly to the young men of St Andrews. But he did not say that it contained, among the few words written by Robert Scott when death was close and visible, this passage :

“I never met a man in my life whom I admired and loved more than you, but I never could show you how much your friendship meant to me, for you had much to give and I nothing.”

Very likely Barrie would say the same. Both men have given much to the world, to make it better.

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In a way, his friends have caught some of the gentle, kindly laughter which he bestows on himself. Charles Frohman, the American impresario, a queer mixture of impulses and piercing intuitions, was one of his worshippers, and Barrie returned the admiration. “To Charles,” write Frohman’s biographers, “London meant J. M. Barrie.” What Frohman meant to Barrie he says himself in the introduction to the great manager’s Life. Frohman “wanted me to be a playwright and I wanted to be a novelist. All those [sixteen] years I fought him on that. He always won.” It must have been a hard battle with a man whom the same volume describes thus :

“Barrie, in all his life, has had only one silk hat. It is of the vintage of the early ’seventies.¹ The only occasion when he wears the much-detested headgear is at the first rehearsal of the companies that do his plays. Then he attires himself in morning clothes, goes to the theatre, nervously holds

¹ If this is true, it is a remarkable instance of precocity. Barrie was only born in 1860.

the hat in his hand while he is introduced to the actors and actresses."

It was not till about 1886, Barrie himself admits, that he bought his first umbrella.

The schoolboy, the never-to-be-grown-up child, is always in him in these little touches, whether he is writing of realities or of imagined things that are often quite as real. I remember one small incident. I had been displaying to a wanderer in London some of the grimy romance of Stepney and Whitechapel, where I then (about 1905) lived. When I had exhibited a horrible old-clothes market, Phil's Rents, and we came into the almost airy and clean highway of Houndsditch (the border kennel of the City of London), the wanderer drew a long breath. "Let us go and buy a weather-house. This is the place for toys. I'm dining with Barrie to-night, and I must take him one." It is perhaps a plausible guess that the house in the tree-tops in *Peter Pan* was suggested by the foliage of a weather-house: and the same toy is mentioned as a symbol in *Alice-Sit-by-the-Fire*.

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It would be possible to find in essays, criticisms, in his own works and utterances, scores of other such twinkles of personality, of a complete simplicity which yet often seems to be the simplicity of different people. Is it possible to isolate (as the chemists say) those different people? Perhaps they may turn out to be one person after all, though Barrie himself claims that there are at least two of him.

II

THE SCHOOLDAYS OF LIFE

“**T**O be born is to be wrecked on an island,” writes Barrie, in a very happy preface to Ballantyne’s *Coral Island* (1913). Kirriemuir—“Thrums”—is not exactly an island. When he was born there in 1860 it was more in the nature of an enclave or native reservation. But it was so remote that in it, as on an island, you had to prepare for a larger civilization by any poor means that lay to your hand: say, a miraculous but not inexhaustible chest of tools now and then washed up from the outer world, or brought on foot by the Flying Stationers—the pedlars or chapmen who preceded Messrs W. H. Smith & Son. Those angels from outside still came to Kirriemuir when Barrie was a boy, as he points out in *A Window in Thrums*: they had been no less welcome two generations before, in the period of *The Little Minister*.

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Such isolation brought a spirit of proud independence. To its stubborn boyhood, all that was best in the world—all that was splendid or most notorious—either originated in Thrums or was to be found there. Sentimental Tommy—the book about him obviously contains many very personal touches—upheld this theory valiantly against foreigners and superior force.

The obverse of the courage derived from this secluded life was a kind of self-centredness, the basis of which, at bottom, was religion: a religion narrow but real and strong. Henley was unerringly right in using his phrase “something of the Shorter Catechist” of Barrie’s friend Stevenson. The same person is present in Barrie himself, but revealed more definitely—for instance, in the description of the literary club of the younger folk of Thrums. A tremendous debate took place on the subject “Is literature necessarily immoral?” To many of them, and to still more of their elders, it necessarily was. To all of them it certainly was on Sundays; though in Thrums, of

course, the Sabbath restrictions were not confined to literature: it was a crime to gather wild flowers on that day. It is to be suspected, however, that, on weekdays at least, the penny dreadful or, at least, Jack Harkaway and the Boys of England (Deadwood Dick and Sexton Blake were not yet available) crept into the Flying Stationers' pack: sheep in wolves' clothing, or else, maybe, we should have had neither "fifteen men on the dead men's chest" nor "a-pirating we go."

However, Barrie evidently, as a boy, realized the difference between the art of fiction and the practice, in fiction, of piety: "*The Swiss Family Robinson* one remembers as almost too satisfactory." Certainly the good pastor was a walking and talking encyclopædia, knew everything and found everything which was needed to make his end-of-the-chapter prayers appropriate. The effect of *The Coral Island* was far other. It produced "my first work of fiction, a record of our adventures [on an island], the *Log Book*." Unlike *The Young Visitors* (to be

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mentioned later), this work, most unhappily, has not been republished, if it yet exists. It may have been like one of Stevenson's Davos booklets.

So in an atmosphere of romance thriving under starvation and duress, Barrie grew up. There was one all-powerful influence on his boyhood—the wisdom of the mother whose life he wrote. When *Margaret Ogilvy* (1896) appeared, many people, not yet recovered from the Victorian stupor of reticence nor aware of an orgy of exposure to come,¹ thought it wrong that the intimacy of a mother and son should be so laid bare. They deemed it either indecent or a wallowing in the sloppy sentiment which some other writers (mostly Scots) were then prone to offer. They said much the same (but they could here bring no charge of sentiment) a dozen years later about the late Sir Edmund Gosse's *Father and Son* (1908).

¹ "The up-to-date memoirs, in which there is a completely successful attempt to dig up the dead and twist a finger in their sockets."—J. M. BARRIE, at Oxford, 20th June 1928.

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But whereas Gosse's father, in his half-fictitious dress, wins from the reader a stern respect in which admiration may draw near love, Margaret Ogilvy, less artificially dressed, compels both admiration and love. Barrie has said that any good work he ever did he owed to his mother. If he had not said so, it would have been clear from his books.

It is impossible here to go in detail into the many little things that must have moulded (but not congealed) Barrie's mind in this early period. It would involve a minute history of mid-Victorian Scotland, with footnotes drawn from England. He went from Thrums, to complete his education, to Dumfries Academy and Edinburgh University. Education in Scotland is education. I do not know that he obtained or sought a specialist's knowledge of anything in particular. But he gained somehow the essential power to which true education should be a means—the power to use, without pedantry, empirical facts, and turn them into life. What is more, he won (unless he

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had it already) a mastery of the English kind of English, while retaining full ease in a rich vernacular. It is true that sometimes—very seldom—his speech bewrayeth him even now. He justifies the fault in *The Little Minister*. “‘Be wary,’” says Dr McQueen to Gavin Dishart. “‘You saw how she kept her feet among her shalls and wills? Never trust a Scotch man or woman who does not come to grief among them.’” But he has a certainty of his own in keeping his feet and (a thing much to be desired) in using short words and avoiding Latinisms. There is no room here for long quotations. One example must be enough: it is from the first chapter of *Sentimental Tommy*—Tommy was often hungry and showed it:

“His mother heard of this and was angry, crying that he had let the neighbours know something she was anxious to conceal, but what he had revealed to them Tommy could not make out; and when he questioned her artlessly, she took him with sudden passion to her flat breast, and often after that she looked at him long and wofully and wrung her hands.”

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Substance apart, words could not be better strung together.

His education in book-learning completed, he obtained, in 1883, a post on the staff of the *Nottingham Journal*—the *Silchester Mirror* of *When a Man's Single*. And now came the rapid development of another Barrie—the skilled craftsman.

There are few of the greater writers of English fiction who have not become men of letters in part through the practice in word-use afforded by hard journalistic work (or its equivalent in their time). But journalism is a dangerous trade—perhaps more dangerous to-day than in 1883. Yet its risk is also its value to those who know how to learn the trade and at the same time to preserve their own souls. The danger of it is that a rapid and even insincere skill may become so easy that words no longer have any true meaning, and become useless as a vehicle of thought. But to those who keep their courage, and warm their conscience with it, the experience of journalism is invaluable. It is of course a strain on the

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mind which is really physical. But it teaches an economy of words, an almost uncanny sense of proportion and orderly argument, which few writers can command of their own mere motion.

In 1885 Barrie invaded the London Press, the literary level of which was high. There is no space here for a disquisition on "the Nineties." To Barrie it mattered that just then there were magazines of standing which welcomed young writers with something to say and a good manner of saying it. Moreover, those magazines had editors who used real editorial power. To Henley, of *The New Review*, perhaps, more modern novelists owe reverence (tinged sometimes with a little fear) than to any other editor of the time. He was absolutely ruthless, as thorough and painstaking as Dickens twenty years earlier, and a far finer judge of literature. Barrie, like Stevenson, came under his sympathetic but devastating eye ; so did Mr H. G. Wells, the late Marriott Watson, and a host of others before the general reader knew them. And his editorial

judgment aimed not at popularity but at excellence. Perhaps that is why *The New Review* died untimely.

But there were other great editors, and to two of these Barrie was more directly indebted—Frederick Greenwood of the *St James's Gazette* and Robertson Nicoll of the newly founded *British Weekly*. In the former journal appeared *Auld Licht Idylls* (in book form, 1888), in the latter *An Edinburgh Eleven* (1889) and *When a Man's Single* ("by Gavin Ogilvy" : 1888). Rather later another Scottish editor—Norman Macleod—accepted *The Little Minister* (1891) for *Good Words*. (David Christie Murray, no mean journalist and a too lightly forgotten novelist, wrote of those times: "To-day the Press of Great Britain swarms with Scotchmen." It always did.)

There are one or two productions of this period (apart from attempts at drama) which Barrie himself would hardly like to see reprinted—like *Better Dead* (1888) and *A Lady's Shoe* (in a miscellany of 1893). They must be mentioned only. It would be

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ghoulis also—though it may be done some day—to disinter odds and ends contributed to various journals and newspapers, which their author does not wish to preserve. The books already mentioned—to which should be added *My Lady Nicotine* (1890)—were all written for periodical publication.

Auld Licht Idylls and *A Window in Thrums* are the converse of one another: the one, vernacular short stories, the other, literary studies of much the same folk and things. *When a Man's Single* is a short-long story which could be dissolved into smaller elements with a little trouble. *My Lady Nicotine* is a joyous set of short stories masquerading as a transcript from life—as indeed it is in many ways. Everyone knows that the Arcadia blend of tobacco is a real mixture. To the expanding business in the Arcadia Mixture were added the Black Cat cigarettes. Even as these words are written, a paragraph appears in an evening journal: “2500 Black Cats Leave London.” It meant that 2500 of Mr Baron's employees were having their annual outing, and were

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greeted by the Mayor of Hastings. It is a peculiar glory to have flamed from whimsical little essay-stories—the creation of a huge commercial enterprise from the chance enthusiasm of a comparatively unknown writer. But it would have been impossible had not Barrie so soon mastered his technique and secured for ever readers for a work which loses no freshness with the years.

The point is important. In *Courage* he said: “The greatest glory that has ever come to me was to be swallowed up in London, not knowing a soul, with no means of subsistence, and the fun of working till the stars went out.” Within five years of his deglutition he had learnt his job. Five years seems a long time to a young man in the whale’s belly: it is short as the growth of literary repute goes. By 1890 Barrie was, as Christie Murray wrote in 1897, “a captain amongst workmen.”

But form without substance is a cold dead thing. There were plenty of admirable artists in technique in “the Nineties.” I am

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only for the moment isolating a second Barrie—the equal of such artists in their own medium. He could by now say what he wished exactly as he wished to say it: any editor will tell you truthfully that ninety per cent. of people cannot do anything of the kind. What had the Shorter Catechist to speak out of himself through James Barrie of London? For the answer we must go back to Thrums.

But before that journey, another exhibition of early arts and crafts must be visited. A good many years later (in 1918) Barrie contributed an introduction to the first volume (*Conrad in Quest of his Youth*) of a new collected edition of Leonard Merrick's works. Merrick was deemed by many to be inadequately appreciated, and this edition was to justify that belief. Barrie, after saying that "for long Merrick has been the novelists' novelist," adds that, "if he has a mission, it is to warn us against authorship and the tawdry glamour of the stage." It is as well the warning was not heeded. Barrie's criticism appeared the year after

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Dear Brutus was put on the stage, and if Merrick had prevented that . . .

However, Barrie either ignored or was ignorant of the "mission" so far back as 1892, when he became by one leap a successful dramatist. On 25th February of that year was produced, at Toole's Theatre, *Walker, London*. It was the first "grown-up" London play I ever saw, with enormous excitement, for I had been patted on the head at a church bazaar by J. L. Toole himself. Toole played Jasper Phipps, the hairdresser who, being engaged to be married, decided to "have the honeymoon before the marriage and to have it by myself"—a thoroughly fresh idea. Phipps arranged a rescue from the river and arrived on a chance houseboat as a big-game hunter, covered with glory until his fiancée traced him.

The chief names in the cast are remarkable—at any rate to-day, when almost every one of them is a household word. Most of the actors have played over and over again for Barrie since.

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The reference to a cane-handled bat has been quoted. The play is definitely a Victorian farcical comedy. Perhaps even its scene—the houseboat—was also of the epoch, though those singular arks are still in use. Barrie had already mentioned one (in *When a Man's Single*), and Stevenson had employed one profitably in *The Wrong Box*.

One other detail in *Walker, London* deserves notice. Andrew McPhail (Mr Seymour Hicks), a medical student, is demonstrating some point to Nanny O'Brien (Miss Mary Ansell):

ANDREW. Take a stomach: remove the——

NANNY. Disgusting!

It is only necessary here to add that *Little Mary* was not produced till twenty-one years later.

Walker, London almost links us up in feeling with the later plays of Robertson (who died in 1871), and it certainly is as capable of revival. It may become a "costume" farce in time.

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It is hard to realize that over thirty-five years ago Barrie was a (so-to-speak) fashionable dramatist in that outworn mode. Nor should we imagine him as one of the unsuccessful rivals of Gilbert and Sullivan, whose first triumphs at the Savoy preceded his own sole appearance (at the same theatre) as a librettist of comic opera. *Jane Annie, or, The Good Conduct Prize*—Jane Ann was the name of a niece of Barrie—was written in conjunction with Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, and produced in 1893. That also I saw in my tender years. As I remember it, it was like a baddish Gilbert and Sullivan. It did not hang well together, and was neither inevitable nor surprising—two necessities of stage effect. The extraordinary thing is that it should have been written at all. There is of course no reason why Barrie should not compose nimble verse, nor why the creator of Sherlock Holmes should not show a lighter wit than his detectives and doctors, professors and soldiers of fortune usually display. But the opera did not live.

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It is probably useless to try to say which words are Barrie's, which Conan Doyle's : it might be no service to either to make the attempt. But the printed version of the text (Chappell : also 1893)¹ contains one feature, of little use for stage purposes, which it is almost impossible not to ascribe to Barrie : the series of marginal comments supposed to be made by "Caddie (a page) . . . Master Harry Rignold." One of them appears at the beginning of this book, by way of a partial text. Another anticipates the name of a character more famous in a later play :

"If I had been there I would have seen through Bab, but I was in the kitchen cleaning the knives."

("Woulds" and "shoulds" for Scots need as sure a step as "wills" and "shalls.") Caddie also, with the self-examining wit of

¹ Among the advertisements are "Tosti's Last Successes" and "New Dance Music"—including six Valses, one Lancers, two Polkas, and nothing else.

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an author, foresees the truest criticism of the play. Certain lines run :

“ Plot unsystematic,
And very erratic.”

It was one of Barrie's own perils when he came to write novels.

One other play may be logically included in this period as being of it in spirit and in time. *The Professor's Love Story* appeared in 1894. It is a sentimental comedy, of a conventional type, and may still be seen (now and then and here and there) without injury to a highbrow, though also without benefit. It has no very marked characteristic to make us pause. It was successful, commercially.

And now it is time to sit under Gavin Dishart. “ ‘ Do I sit under anybody ? ’ repeated Babbie blankly. . . . ‘ I only mean [said Gavin], what denomination do you belong to ? ’ ” *In quâ te quaero proseuchâ* (where is your Meeting House) ? In the Kailyard.

III

THE KAILYARD OR THE STAGE?

THE Nineties—the term is not precise, but is taken to mean roughly the period from about 1880 to Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee—are now a generation behind us, as historians measure time. We have not yet reached a wholly true perspective of their population, but the quick are beginning to sort themselves from the dead, who are falling into their periodic cycles of exhumation and reinterment. Even some of the labels are half-forgotten.

As to the term "Kailyard" itself, let us hear the austere words of the greatest English dictionary: "The Kailyard School: a class of recent fiction, affecting to describe, with much use of the vernacular, common life in Scotland." Lest the definition be thought contemptuous, it should be added that this English dictionary was edited by a Scotsman. "Kailyard," Southern readers

should know, means cabbage-patch, for all practical purposes : America, a little later, cultivated similar ground for literary purposes. The term, not an unhappy one, was based upon a quotation by " Ian Maclaren " (Dr John Watson) from an old Jacobite song about " the bonny brier bush in our kailyard "—his *Beside the Bonnie Brier Bush* (1894) standing worthily high in the products of the school.

The virtues of the school were as hotly debated as those of the " Yellow Book." But whereas they were at least pure, and the worst that could be said of them was that they were the gibberings of the village idiot (something like that *was* said of Thomas Hardy's folk), the " Yellow Book " virtues could be deemed vices. What vexed judicious critics, and sometimes drove them to insensate rage, was the rapture of the partial scribes. David Christie Murray—the name is not exactly Saxon—has been quoted on the overcrowding of the Press by Scots. He mentions with scorn a critic who said that in some ways Samuel Rutherford

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Crockett "rivalled, if not surpassed, Sir Walter." But of Barrie he wrote: "there is little fear that in the final judgment of the public and his peers he will be huddled up with Maclarens and Crocketts, as he sometimes is to-day." (The reference is to Crockett's *The Stickit Minister* (1893) and *The Lilac Sunbonnet* (1894) and Dr Watson's novel already mentioned. Crockett himself was a minister, but not "stickit.")¹

Some such "school" (a bad term) was bound to appear, and, like every heresy or new faith, he too clamorous at first, too greedily accepted. Though Meredith and Hardy were living in vigour to carry on the spacious style, the death of Dickens and Thackeray had made room for eager young men in reaction against the classical grand manner. The mere form of the novel changed with the times. *The Little Minister* appeared first in three volumes (1891). But

¹ "Douglas's" *House with the Green Shutters* (1901) should not be forgotten. It was drastically anti-kail in sentiment. But it was a kailyard piece in localization. The author was George Douglas Brown.

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within ten years that form was dead. Almost blatantly, as if kicking it aside, the short story, an infinitely more difficult thing to make perfect, took its place. The novel itself, however, had its separate existence in an intermediate state of length—from sixty to one hundred thousand words long instead of three hundred thousand : a day or two for a quick reader's leisure instead of a drawing-room occupation for a fortnight. Such details are vivid little reflections of larger social change. What is more, the matter changed, for a time, with the manner. The newer writers composed specialized small portraits, and narrowed their work to a highly wrought artistic compass, within which they could show a few characters in clear-cut interaction—or even skin just one single soul. Such novelists certainly added to the English technique of letters, and writers in other veins, like Barrie, were, as has been said, influenced by that technique. Further, they chose subjects themselves limited as much by geography as by other aspects of life ; and within

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that limited province lay the Kailyard School.

In a way—indeed, almost in essence—such a branch of fiction is, in English letters, more universal than those that take all the world of land and water, as well as all the continent of human life, for their province. It exists because of one unchanging thing in man's soul: the love of place—deep inherent love of one particular place. You may write of “common life” or “the vernacular.” You may notice that “Q” was finding at this very time a “yard” of his own sort in his Delectable Duchy—Ia, a “Little Minister” story of Cornwall, published in 1896, was dedicated to Barrie. You may think that the Celtic Revival—of which W. B. Yeats's *Celtic Twilight*, published in 1893, is an early representative—was either the awakening of a small old race, or the fresh enthusiasm of local zealots—as you please. You cannot but be aware that Thomas Hardy had since 1872 (*Under the Greenwood Tree*) been using his intimate knowledge of Dorset to illuminate England

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and human nature. You will perceive that in two or three years' time Arnold Bennett was to arrive with his *Five Towns* equipment.

All these were phenomena of "the Nineties," and all have the same outward show of being, so to speak, literature by counties. But they are all really manifestations of one deep permanent spirit, which spoke through the greatest Scottish writer of the day to the least of the three chief kailyarders—"R. L. S." to S. R. Crockett:

"Blows the wind to-day, and the sun and
the rain are flying,
Blows the wind on the moors to-day
and now,
Where about the graves of the martyrs
the whaups are crying,
My heart remembers how."

That profound feeling is as old and as young as the folk-lore in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* or *King Lear*, as the joy of birds and sunshine in Chaucer, as the sense of the universe in the opening pages of *The Return of the Native*; as local and as universal.

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The Little Minister, Barrie's first "long" novel, is the greatest work of the pure Kailyard School. It is also of great significance in the personal literary history of J. M. Barrie. The book and the play, taken together, must therefore be examined more closely than is necessary with most of the author's other works. Even the details of its plot are suggestive.

The plot, in outline, is this. The scene is, of course, Thrums. "Thrums is the name I give to the handful of houses jumbled together in a cup, which is the town nearest the school-house. Until twenty years ago its every other room, earthen-floored and showing the rafters overhead, had a handloom." That is from *Auld Licht Idylls*, which is written as a short glance back from 1889. But *The Little Minister* deals with the Thrums of the early nineteenth century—an epoch of industrial change which suits the discontent of the weavers in the opening chapters. That is, in fact, one defect in the book. There is little attempt at creating an atmosphere of the past,

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except in so far as Thrums is invariably represented as retaining the past in the present.¹

A new Auld Licht minister, Gavin Dishart, has come to Thrums, his first call. He had had a hard boyhood, hungry as Sentimental Tommy for mere bread. He has a hard manhood before him in this first ministry. His inexperience, though he quickly gets a hold on his congregation, has to meet a trouble which involves all the village, not only his own denomination. The weavers had rebelled against a reduction in the price of their web by the manufacturers (a common event in those grim times after the Napoleonic Wars—as now), and had taken the matter up forcibly, driving out, “under the command of some Chartists,” the police who were sent to arrest rioters. It was expected that the police would be succeeded by soldiers, against whose coming the whole village set a watch. They came in utter secrecy; but warning had been

¹ But did even sailors say “So-long” for “Good-bye” (chapter ii.) in 1817?

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conveyed by a mysterious gipsy, and there was fighting. How had the gipsy learned the plans of the military ?

The gipsy's identity is revealed to the reader, but to no one else, at the end of chapter four, before the battle takes place in the Market Square of Thrums. She is the betrothed of Lord Rintoul, the great local landowner, an unpopular man much older than she. The villagers know little of her personally by repute, and only one, apparently—who makes the revelation, not heard in the rush of the moment—has ever seen her. This is a more serious weakness in the plot, singular in a writer so advanced in the construction of shorter stories. The reader is forced to share what must seem to him the stupid conjectures and unusual ignorance of people who, to start with (if met in print south of the Tweed), speak a very difficult language. The mystery to them is no mystery to him, even if, as is probable, he would soon solve it without this early aid.

The strange double identity of Babbie is

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another mystery. But this is kept from the reader as well, up to chapter twenty-nine, when it is explained to Gavin, and then it becomes a poor device of melodrama, a piece of hurried psychology made to fit the plot—or to justify it arbitrarily. The gipsy “complex” was due to real gipsy blood.

The plot and mystification are ingeniously handled if you once accept the main situation. It consists in the gradual growth of suspicion of Gavin among his congregation. Rob Dow, a drunkard whom he has saved from utter wreckage, sees and overhears him with the gipsy. Gavin has saved her from the troops, mainly through her own impudence and the fascination she has for him, and Dow, thinking her vile (in a renewal of his drunkenness), seeks to kill her. By this time, it must be understood, Babbie and Gavin have come to real love instead of the one being an impish coquette and the other spellbound and dismayed; and because of that love Gavin had failed to attend the Auld Lights meeting to pray for rain—which, when it came, flooded the

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whole Thrums valley, and, incidentally, left Lord Rintoul stranded on a dissolving island in the torrent which had once been a river. Gavin makes a prodigious leap to save him, but it is useless, for a rope cannot be got to them, while the islet is being slowly washed away. Suddenly, at the last moment, Rob Dow appears, manages to get a rope to them for their rescue, lame though he is, and is washed away to death as he succeeds.

That is not meant to be a bald and unsympathetic account (with a host of details omitted) of a plot which is desultory and forced, thin and melodramatic, by turns, yet powerful, on the whole, throughout. The unfolding of the events—and this is the greatest weakness of all—is unfortunately put into the mouth of a sentimental dominie who (quite unnecessarily) turns out to be Gavin's father—his mother having unwittingly committed bigamy. Gavin Ogilvy is a bore and a hindrance to the story. He enters into the action of the tale, but he need not have been made to tell it. Moreover, if he is to be regarded as a real

part of the happenings, he could not possibly have known all the tiny details and the verbal conversations which are made part of his personal narrative. He is, as a character, never quite alive : least of all in his references to "the lovelight in the eyes," and in his sententious general utterances on life.

These criticisms of the machinery apart, there are small irregularities, though they are not material. The strength of the tale is greater than its weakness. The descriptions of the storm and of the rescue of Gavin and Lord Rintoul, in some sort irrelevant to the plot, at any rate in length, are magnificent ; magnificent also in its homely tenderness and restraint is the prevented removal of old Nanny to the poorhouse. She was whispering and moaning as the Little Minister prayed before she left her cottage : her husband, one of the rioters, was in prison—the rent not paid (the dots are in the text) :

" ' I hae to gang . . . I'm a base woman no' to be mair thankf' to them that is so good to me. . . . I dinna' like to prig wi'

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them to take a roundabout road, and I'm sair fleid a' the Roods will see me. . . . If it could just be said to poor Sanders when he comes back that I had died hurriedly, syne he would be able to haud up his head. . . . Oh, mither ! . . . I wish terrible they had come and ta'en me at nicht. . . . It's a dog-cart, and I was praying it micht be a cart, so that they could cover me wi' straw.'

" 'This is more than I can stand,' the doctor cried.

" Nanny rose frightened.

" 'I've tried you sair,' she said, 'but, oh, I'm grateful, and I'm ready now.' "

If that be the false sentiment for which the Kailyard is blamed, I am in favour of such insincerities.

That brings me to the vexed question of dialect. It is in the long run a matter of personal taste and knowledge. Certainly a uniform tongue—which Hardy feared in Dorset when Board Schools first came, but which has by no means come to pass, and is far distant yet—would be a dreadful and lifeless thing. Dialect is necessary. I cannot for the life of me say why " My luv is like

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a red red rose ” and “ Till a’ the seas gang dry ” *are* somehow better thus than in the nearly identical English spelling ; but they are, and there is no sound translation of “ for auld lang syne,” not even “ for old times’ sake.” The plain truth is, dialect is not only necessary, but natural. The dominie does one good service in *The Little Minister* :

“ When she was excited the Harvie words come back to her, as they come back to me. I have taught the English language all my life, and I try to write it, but everything I say in this book I first think to myself in the Doric. This, too, I notice, that in talking to myself I am broader than when gossiping with the farmers of the glen, who send their children to me to learn English, and then jeer at them if they say ‘ old lights ’ instead of ‘ auld lights.’ ”

Dialect is of a piece with that “ subordinate patriotism ” (as Lord Balfour long ago called it) which justifies all that is good in Kailyard or any other local fiction.

The Little Minister, as a novel, is a little

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unwieldy. As a play it is quite a different thing, because the local humour is compressed and uninterrupted by comment or description. On the other hand the humour suffers for that very reason, because there is an inevitable tendency to make the seriousness of Thrums folk ridiculous—to parody it, in fact. You cannot put this sort of gentle laughter on to the stage without the exaggeration which leads to something like a guffaw from the ignorant. But the plot, if it loses in atmosphere and intimacy, and the values are changed, makes a “straight” play. That is the sense of what Mr Bernard Shaw said about it in *The Saturday Review* :

“ Mr Barrie is a born story-teller ; and he sees no further than his stories—conceives any discrepancy between them and the world as a shortcoming on the world’s part, and is only too happy to be able to rearrange matters in a pleasanter way. . . . He does the thing as if he liked it, and does it very well. He has apparently no eye for human character ; but he has a keen sense

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of human qualities, and he produces highly popular assortments of them . . . [Gavin and Babbie] are nine-tenths fun and the other tenth sentiment, which makes a very toothsome combination "(*Dramatic Opinions and Essays*, vol. ii.).

Mr Shaw had deliberately not read the novel, and therefore seized on the strong point of the play—the story—which is the weak point of the book, while he noted the play's defect in human light and shade—the strong point of the book.

The Little Minister, then, is in a way a struggle between the old and the new modes of fiction. It is some 132,000 words long—longer than the usual novels of "the Nineties," but much shorter than those of the preceding generation. It was an attempt, by one who had hitherto practised only the new brevity, to write a localized romance in something like the older spacious manner. It is far above any work of the true Kailyard School for that very reason. Thrums, in this novel, is not a little lost village in the hills, peopled by folk of another race, a

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far-off age. It is a part of the large round world—and a critic of it.

This was for Barrie an enlargement of power; for the novel of small, beloved places, it was an enlargement of scope, such as till then only Hardy had seriously attempted. As a play, it had no marked significance, though it may well have intensified the author's knowledge of and gift for stage-craft. It was not until his next long novel, when dramatized, turned into something wholly new in the English theatre, wholly fresh to the English imagination, that it became quite certain that Frohman's judgment was right. But before that he was to have the wide experience that comes to an established playwright—without, at the same time, adding much to his experience as a maker of stories.

I do not pretend to know what was the effect on the author personally of the double success of *The Little Minister*. He has written, strictly speaking, a great deal in many modes. His longer novels and plays,

whether the mere toil of writing comes easily to him or not, have seldom the air of rapid manufacture (the word is meant in no offensive sense—an author worth reading is a *maker*, not a machine¹). But however he worked, at whatever rate, Barrie accomplished a great deal of writing in the decade after the appearance of the two *Little Ministers*. In the end, several productions appeared simultaneously. The major achievements which followed the Haymarket play, in order of time and outward appearance, were *Sentimental Tommy* (1896), *Tommy and Grizel* (1900), *The Little White Bird* (1902), *Quality Street*, *The Admirable Crichton* and *Little Mary* (all 1903 !), *Peter Pan* (as a play, 1904), *Alice-Sit-by-the-Fire* (1905) and *What Every Woman Knows* (1908). Three longish novels and seven plays, all of first-rate importance to the author and to current literature, in twelve years, to say nothing of smaller things ! At one time in this period

¹ “Art is science with an addition.”—THOMAS HARDY, in *Life and Letters*, No. 1, June 1928.

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he had four plays running simultaneously in London.

It is suggestive to group the items in this record of output according to their souls rather than their birthdays. The two *Tommy* books rather bewildered the average reader at first. Even if by now the Kailyard was deserted, Barrie had shown enough genius to be condemned to perpetual sameness, the frequent fate of a successful artist. Yet here he was doing something new : providing plenty of Scotland, no doubt, but actually (to use the eighteenth-century manner) "exhibiting the frailties of the human heart" with hardly any need for Scotland or the Doric at all. For as Tommy grew up (perhaps M'Connachie with him) it became clear that, though he had deep roots in Thrums, his field was the world. Character and temperament had ousted plot and scenery, which were now only vivid accessories.

These two novels are consecutive, and should preferably be read as one. But they are also complete separate works of art.

Moreover, as works of art, they are easily Barrie's best pieces of fiction. He draws with a delicate certainty of ease the unconscious struggle in a young egoist who at one moment surprises himself by his own straightforward power, at another is very vain about it. Tommy can fall in love like a fool (or let us say like any other silly boy, and also like a vain young man), and see the folly of it, and yet be equally in love, in quite a different way, with the serenity, the intimate trustworthiness of Grizel—who again is in love, but in yet another kind of love: the eternal love of a potential mother, an emotion which Barrie, in his austerest moments of restraint, has conveyed into scant words too deep for tears. He knows the very soul of a still childless woman. It is likewise the soul of a grandmother, long past the ordeal of childbirth, when she sees the pink starfish hands of her first grandson. And it may be the soul of a childless man when he sees loved persons enjoying a happiness that may never come to fulfilment in himself. Every woman knows that

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emotion : it is the ultimate source of her power, even if she uses it in squandered sentiment or in wantonness, or if she never has the chance to use it at all. Sometimes, when a young man is honestly in love, he knows that power, peers right into it, and should for a moment worship it—until he forgets, as Tommy forgot and as Grizel knew he would forget.

If that is (as it seems to me in a faint attempt at defining the undefinable) what Barrie wishes to convey of the personality of Grizel, it was inspiration to make such a woman “mother” Tommy. Tommy is irresistibly real. You can believe in his genius as well as in his contradictory sincerity, his honest dishonesty. If Arnold Bennett’s “Card” had been lovable he might have stood for a distant relation of Tommy. But Tommy could never have been a Card, for, even in realities, his was the kingdom of the sensitive mind, and his world was not one of entirely material, even vulgar, intuitions. He had a good conceit of himself, but he saw the other man’s point of view

with sympathy and tenderness—not with love, as Grizel saw it, nor with derisive triumph like Denry Machin's.

Such novels—and there have been few at all like *Sentimental Tommy* and *Tommy and Grizel*—are to be felt, not dissected. Quotation and summary are useless. Though less in range than *The Little Minister*, they run in a deeper channel. They fulfil the promise of *Auld Licht Idylls*, while they render the dialect no longer an integral part of the author's equipment. Further, they reveal plainly a searching knowledge of character used with a decoration of simple true sentiment which makes Gavin Ogilvy and Margaret Dishart in the earlier book look like mere puppets, while the humour employed to pose Gavin Dishart and Babbie is mechanical beside that divided between Tommy and Grizel. Finally, they contain a full hint of what was soon to be so pronounced in Barrie's work—his reverence (almost his longing) for motherhood: for the relation, not of an adoring and grateful son to the best of mothers, but of the mother

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knowing all desires and all terrors for her child, like the Madonna.

But Grizel's actions, after all, and Tommy's too, have their universal quality, and a dramatic quality at that. Woman's dominion over man, by whatever means achieved, first chronicled in Genesis iii. 6, has been absent from no picture of life ever since. Barrie turned to that oldest of subjects, as all modern writers must, in order to discover or (if possible) to reveal why Adam was willing to eat the apple. There is no generally accepted explanation, but the complexity of modern life has provided an indefinite number of possible solutions. Barrie tried two, the earlier of which, however, was more in the nature of homage to an adorable actress than a serious wrestle with an everlasting problem.

It is to be supposed that no more delicious compliment, even to Ellen Terry, than this (from *Courage*) has ever been paid: she is

“the loveliest of all young actresses, the dearest of all old ones; it seems only

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yesterday that all the men of imagination proposed to their beloved in some such frenzied words as these, 'As I can't get Miss Terry, may I have you?' "

Now that she is dead, those who saw her and knew her realize the truth of that sublime exaggeration. George Bernard Shaw wrote *Captain Brassbound's Conversion* because Ellen Terry was there to act in it. Barrie's tribute was *Alice-Sit-by-the Fire*. There is not much more in it than the competent unexpectedness of which Barrie is a gentler master than Shaw. The grown-up fairy-by-the-fire is equal to all difficult trivialities just because she is a woman. She likens herself to the weather-house woman, alternating with her daughter: yet it is she, not the daughter, who brings the fair weather.

Of course, by "woman," in any of Barrie's comedies, you do not mean what Mr Turveydrop meant by "Wooman, love-ly wooman." You mean (if you are a man) a creature of the opposite sex who has supreme insight and an uncanny, almost wicked, power of

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concealing the fact. That is really one of Barrie's additions to stage characterization. He gradually evolved a standard type of elusiveness, capable of infinite variety. He was able, by now, for the first time, to suggest, and to bring to life without the over-emphasis which clumsier writers must often use in the theatre, something much more intricate than an obvious hard-cut secretive opposite number of the male.

In *What Every Woman Knows* he gave the fireside woman a tacitly aggressive part. It is true that he also gave her a humourless young Scottish politician to play with. But the deliberate juxtaposition of Maggie and John Shand does but remove them further from the class of stock characters, makes them more vivid and individual. Maggie not only carries an election for John in such a way that he thinks he has done it all by himself ; she even forces him to see a joke. As for what every woman really knows, it is, in the long run, everything, but chiefly that men are children, and every wise woman can manage a child. Barrie would

probably add that most women are wise after their several kinds.

Miss Trevelyan—whose salary Frohman very rightly doubled by cable on hearing of her success in “a Barrie part”—is by now almost to be considered an integral element in his plays. She “made” *Little Mary*. As for the central idea of the play, a sentence about a section of the human body has been quoted from *Walker, London* (p. 29). That horrid organ had never been mentioned in “the Nineties.” In the Bible or in a famous fable you could say “belly” instead, or you could use the noun as a verb. But even in 1903, it is alleged, you could not stomach the word itself. You effected wonderful cures by means of the usual purges and electuaries, and put them down to the precepts of Little Mary. For the rest, the advice of the professional in the play was really enough—“when she is not eat-ing, she should be sleep-ing; and when she is not sleep-ing, she should be eat-ing.” But if you confessed, with the hesitation that

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Miss Trevelyan can feign superbly, that "It—it—it's——" (the forbidden word, spoken outright), all your magic was gone, your spell broken. There is something of the Shorter Catechist in the notion that the word "stomach" was still *tabu* in 1903.

In its way, *Little Mary* is another *Doctor's Dilemma*, and in its way it is also just as true a satire, though Barrie did not, I believe, have to consult Sir Almroth Wright on the accuracy of scientific allusions, nor was he so fiercely in earnest as Bernard Shaw. The play is serious hilarity. Its sub-plot and its corroborative details are informed with unexpectedness, with sudden laughter, with the pleasant discomfort of feeling that you are yourself as great a fool as the people on the stage. The whimsical but sane chief idea was a complete novelty. If it were any compliment one would say that no one but Barrie would have thought of it. But that compliment must be paid automatically to nearly all his plays, even when they are disappointing.

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Here was originality lent to something near farce. But it was a long step from such farce as *Walker, London*. The same year gave birth to *Quality Street*, and here is less originality, but almost perfect craftsmanship, such as might have made *The Little Minister* a great costume comedy if it had not been adapted from the more ambitious work whose breath of Scottish life grew faint and flickered indoors behind footlights. *Quality Street* might be a chapter out of *Cranford*. Miss Susan and Miss Phoebe (even as the soi-disant Miss Libby, her twenty-years-younger niece) wear the costume of *Cranford* or *Emma*. But Barrie, not Miss Austen nor Mrs Gaskell, put these words into Miss Susan's mouth :

“ ‘ I think I must have been too unattractive. . . . Even plain women, we can't help it ; when we are young we have romantic ideas just as if we were pretty.’ ”

It would have come out less explicitly in narrative in the older novels. To be able to say it, or cause it to be said, *naturally*, on

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the stage, is not within the reach of many dramatists even to-day.

The historical setting of the play is sure and sound. There is no reason why forgotten turns of speech and (what is more dangerous) forgotten, transitory idioms of the mind should not be always part of humane letters, on the stage as well as in books. Labels like "costume," "sword and cloak," "tushery" are only relevant if a play depends wholly on its dresses or on exotic oaths. *Quality Street* has no such dependence.

✓ This was the period of Barrie's greatest activity—or at least greatest visibility—as a playwright. The mere productions sufficed to prove his versatility. Popularity (which does matter, however much it is despised : it has a moral as well as financial effect) made him independent—that is to say, he could be sure that his experiments would receive a full and even a sympathetic public test. But none of these plays was fundamentally an experiment. He merely employed his vagrom genius within the bounds

of a recognized form, presenting life rather than criticizing it. These comedies, even if sentences and parts of scenes in them were always taking the spectator out of a play into reality, did not as a whole leave one disturbed about the foundations of society, doubtful whether romance can exist, uncertain if after all we are not such stuff as dreams are made on. To write a play which aimed at that effect would be indeed an experiment. Whether it was its aim or not, *The Admirable Crichton* seemed to be such an experiment. For those who saw its first run, it succeeded. For those who, having seen the first run, witnessed the revival some years later, the success was doubtful; but it comes back with the printed text and the conversational stage-directions. The play is a conquest, not an experiment.

Here, since *Crichton* on its first production was superbly acted, it is as well to interpolate an aside on the very important matter of the people who played for Barrie. His words seem to fit the actors automatically, but yet, while they "speak themselves,"

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they obviously owe also a great deal to the speakers. In certain parts, of course, there can be to most of us only one perfect interpreter. Captain Hook, for instance, is so infectious, so happily extravagant a reality, that his part almost acts itself. Yet even so, it will most likely be held that only a Du Maurier could smoke two cigars at once, in a double holder which is clearly a converted "catty-prong," with such large gusto, or retire backwards with such modest terror at Smee's rending of the calico.¹ Comparison of such acting with that of other players in the same part—however admirably the later comers performed—suggests that while the actor could not but take great opportunities of distinction, the playwright was often fortunate in the person who had the opportunity.

The Admirable Crichton — though such a judgment may seem a little unkind—

¹ This device was introduced only in the second, or possibly third, year of *Peter Pan*'s life, if I remember rightly. There were a good many small stage-changes like this.

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illustrates this personal aspect of stage performance. When it was first played, in addition to the performers mentioned above, it contained the predominant figure of H. B. Irving—of a personality, from the moment he appeared on the stage even in a poor play, always no less compelling than his illustrious father's, far stronger than any other man's of that Edwardian time. His companions were all of the highest theatrical rank. They acted the piece as what, in its first week and on the many other occasions during the run on which I witnessed it, it has always remained to me, by sheer conviction—a serious and profound romance, a comedy only in the most splendid sense, at times a farce that made you hate laughter and long for some expressive compromise between tears and a smile. It was probably, all through, better acted than any play of our times. When it was revived, it was nothing but an original and laughable comedy—almost a farce.

I do not think the difference means that the first set of actors gave Barrie a loftiness

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he had not put into the work. It is only necessary to read the printed play with his running narrative of "stage directions" to see that his intention was neither ordinary nor farcical. The change on the revival was in the conception and stage execution of the play as a whole. It was directed, on its second appearance, to the ear and the eye, to the experienced and hardened connoisseur of dramatic presentation, not to the imagination. Remember that "dramatic" and "theatrical" are adjectives that have been perverted beyond all use by reason of that very habit of thinking of the audience more than of the author: they now connote the unreal and the unnatural.

It is useless to criticize *The Admirable Crichton* further than by the above attempt at defining it as it seemed when it was fresh to its first audiences. The plot, too, is well enough known to need no summary. All that need be done is to mention a few episodes or passages which in 1903 carried away the audience, and, to my thinking, would always do so at a first sight of the

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play, or at a first reading of the elaborated text.

The first of these is of a general kind. The idea that an extreme Radical peer, Lord Loam, should periodically give a party at which his servants were his guests and his daughters their hostess-servants was fresh, and might have been farcical. But the earnestness of Henry Kemble turned even the ridiculously grave warning "Recitation!" (the penalty for sluggishness in courtesy among the hostesses) into pure comedy. H. B. Irving's severely restrained disapproval made it certain that these were real figures, not people trying to be funny. The social satire was going to go deep beneath the surface. The irresistible laughter that met it was not a noisy reaction to the red nose and slapstick. It was a happy gesture of wonder.

In the Second Act the comedy deepened. Lord Loam's entry on hands and knees, through the bushes, implied the ludicrous dethronement of a respectable social figure: the bucket for epigrams was the equally

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ludicrous catastrophe of pretentiousness. But Crichton's anger over the disregarded hairpin brought reality into the situation. These well-to-do persons, living hitherto, like the Greeks and Romans, on an economic basis of something like slavery, were cast on their own resources, and they had none. Lord Loam had ceased to be funny: he was very nearly tragic, poor old man.

The "curtain" to this Act was the climax of the mainly comic part of the play, and was ingeniously but penetratingly absurd: the other two curtains should be serious tragi-comedy. A feeling of wonder, but now also of possible disaster, grows as Crichton sits smoking in the dim light of a fire over which a cooking-pot exhales delicious odours of food, and slowly, on all-fours, the rest, impotent to prepare their own food, come creeping into the lure. "The Guv'" is already enthroned. Is it a romance, or a comedy, or something more?

In the Third Act—made too farcical if it is played at all uncertainly or self-consciously—there is an atmosphere of timeless liberty.

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Only sincerity matters. When the Guv' quotes Henley to Polly (Lady Mary) he is using words of the old world as well as of a new one ; not of the civilization of to-day's moment. But the gun sounds. Lord Loam wakes up to be a Member of the House of Lords again, welcoming the safe, sound, unchanging Royal Navy, and receiving (without refusing) all the credit for the island's makeshift civilization. The Guv' lets the feathered robe slip slowly from his shoulders, as Polly changes wanly back into Lady Mary ; and his hands no less slowly come together in the former butler's posture of washing with invisible soap. "She goes away," says the printed text. "There is none to salute him now, unless we do it."

The first audiences did it, after, if I remember rightly, a little silent gasp. There had been nothing like this before : in their time no such finished acting, no such perfect stagecraft ; and in no time so fine a piece of ironic romance, of romantic truth. Yet the last Act, with its rippling comedy, was never an anti-climax, and when Crichton

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says that he and Tweeny are going to take a little pub in the Harrow Road, at the sign of "The Case is Altered," the laughter, once more, was something like the sound of a pain in the heart.

This great play achieved three things. It brought fresh air, the wind of healthy fantasy, into the artificial scenery of the stage. But the fantasy had ideas behind it. It was not compact of pretty bubbles nor charged with majestic sonorities—it was life in gay robes that lit up the souls of those who wore them. It proved, in the second place, that Barrie the workman had it in him to produce a flawless work of art ; for in *Crichton* there is not one loose end, not one unnecessary word, not one facetious triviality. Finally, it opened the door wide for M'Connachie. That half of Barrie could now laugh at the family solicitor, and go flying in the sun with two wings (not one) outspread and shining. The journalist had caught the angels, and they were to do his bidding.

IV

FAIRYLAND, KISSES, AND TRIFLES

THE play of *Peter Pan* came a year later than *The Admirable Crichton*. But its substance had been in the novel, *The Little White Bird* (1902), and had been hinted at in *Tommy and Grizel* (1900), where Tommy, as T. Sandys, meditates a work which should deal with a boy who hated the idea of growing up. The chapters from *The Little White Bird* (beginning with chapter thirteen) which were more or less part of the play were separately issued in 1906 as *Peter Pan in Kensington Gardens*, for which Mr Arthur Rackham did many delicately imaginative pictures. In that form—as illustrated—the tale suggests both George Macdonald and a fusion of Hans Andersen's tales with the more ethereal passages in Grimm; a little of Charles Lamb might be added for the London flavour of the writing. Later—in 1911—Barrie made the

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play into a story, under the title of *Peter Pan and Wendy*. There have been authorized versions, simplifications, adaptations, and the like, by more than one author, aided by more than one artist. The play itself, as has been said, changed in minor details of presentation in successive years. The work itself really did begin as a play for actual children, and, according to Frohman's *Life*, Barrie was nervous about its success. Certainly it was like nothing ever seen on the stage before. Modest fear need hardly have daunted the author of *The Admirable Crichton*. But parents always feel chill and dread when, from the wings, they see their best-loved child facing his first audience. Afterwards . . .

Consider first the novel—the last as yet published by the author. It would be fair to say that some parts of it came near to frightening its eager readers. The fancy of the Kensington Gardens portion is exquisite. Some of its prettiest whimsies are not used in the play; for instance, the absurdly pathetic transformation of the

parish boundary stones into little tombstones—just the sort of invention a wise humorist would make on the spot (as maybe Barrie did) for young friends. Kensington Gardens themselves, of course, are in no way vital to the play, and their rather too pretty-pretty statue of Peter Pan (given to the Gardens by Barrie himself, and since reproduced—with a Civic inauguration—in Liverpool) has little to do with the play: it is inspired, if by anything, by a passage in *The Little White Bird*. Indeed it ignores altogether a very important half of Peter of the play. Peter in stone is a delicate figure piping to rabbits, wood nymphs, and various other creatures. There is no trace of his valour, and no vestige of the play's ever-present humour. Now killing pirates was Peter's skilled trade, if ever he had one.

So much for Peter in *The Little White Bird*. It was the rest of the book which was in many respects disquieting. It is nearly formless as a narrative. But that would not matter if the atmosphere had been more

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even. It is at its clearest and purest in the Kensington Gardens section, and much of that devoted to David and his mother ("Mary A——," whom "I"—the narrator—once loved vainly) touches deep and true sentiment. The device by which "I" returned to the days before David was born has the extravagance of free genius. "I" simply takes a cab and tells the cabman to drive back six years: he does not possess a Time Machine, or a magic crystal, or any Eastern appurtenance—he just does it: what could be more natural?

Unfortunately "I" is a member of a club—the Junior Old Fogies' Club. From its window he is able to watch the courtship of Mary A——. It is to be feared the Club was well-named. Barrie often makes effective stage use of the English shyness—the inability of father and son, for instance, to express their true feelings to one another; the unconquerable refusal to do so, rather. Englishmen distrust, abhor, explicit real emotion, though they seem sometimes to

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love the sham. Barrie, from his Club window, loses his restraint in this matter.

Even this would have been a pardonable weakness, since "I" after all is out for sentiment on the two subjects in respect of which a certain licence is usually recognized—mothers and courtship. But he is also engaged with the father-husband complex, and this he studies through a Club waiter who must maintain his grave servility while his wife is seriously ill, maybe dying.

It is hard to say why this kind of thing is a weakness in a serious artist—why it seems a denial of truth when we know it to be true in fact. Perhaps the reason grows clear if you recollect the case of Crichton. He had to go back to be—for a time—the subservient butler of the woman who had loved him when she was free, of the employer whose accepted ruler he had been. In that effort Crichton, as a man, stands for a general idea: he is the chief person in a conflict of ideals. It does not happen to everyone to confront naked fate moved by a social system—to be one of the "lonely

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antagonists of destiny," as a forgotten poet of "the Nineties" called them. The waiter is nothing of the kind. His wife was dying. But every day many people have dying wives, and must keep a stiff upper lip; it is a normal thing. We have tacitly agreed that such fortitude is a social necessity, not a virtue to be named, exhibited and talked about; nor should an author, therefore, use it to open our lachrymal ducts deliberately.

These discrepant elements make *The Little White Bird* a failure as a novel, in spite of its insight and humour. It leaves the reader glad that Frohman the stage-manager prevailed over Barrie the would-be novelist: *Peter Pan* alone is enough, by mere contrast with the quarry from which it was dug, to justify the victory.

It would be superfluous to describe the play. But it is curiously interesting in some of the details we now take for granted. They show the omniscience of the eternal boy in Barrie—the ideas which have occurred to other people and been forgotten.

For instance, the preposterousness of the

dress-tie, one of the homely nuisances which are apt to make up much of life when a man's single, was a discovery of the domestic humorists of "the Nineties." But "the Nineties" (when Landseer was still the only known animal artist) would never have tolerated a large dog in bedrooms, nor allowed her to turn on the bath taps. Flying, however—which has a history reaching in fact to Leonardo, in legend to Icarus, in English fiction to *Peter Wilkins*—is not so difficult nor so wonderful now as in 1904, when the natural explanation of it was that you only needed faith to fly whenever you liked.

The wonders of the Never Never Land—a place, like the Swiss Family Robinson's island, "almost too satisfactory"—have many analogues. Underground homes are common knowledge. Examples occur, as scientists say, in *Aladdin*, *Big Klaus and Little Klaus*, the epic of the Nibelungs, and *Alice in Wonderland*, to name only a few classics of Subterranea. The name of the Never Never Land is found in the early records of Australian travel. As for the

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pirates, and the swelling speech of Jas. Hook and Pan, the Flying Stationers of Thrums surely provided them. Crocodiles are recurrent beasts in most works of real and fictitious adventure. I seem to remember one that had its mouth pegged open—no inspector from the R.S.P.C.A. being present—and was triumphantly ridden by a young hero. But the memory of man runneth not to the swallowing of clocks, nor to such fastidiousness of greed that the creature must needs follow Jas. Hook over land and (apparently) sea for another taste of him.

As for the wolves and their dread of inverted tergiversation, that is the sort of legend which has run through all manner of travel books. If Uncle Joseph Finsbury of *The Wrong Box* could ever have put his chaotic notes into even a rambling narrative, it would certainly have turned up there. I do not remember it in Herodotus or Marco Polo. I suspect it originally appeared in one of the many prosy pilgrimage volumes of the eighteenth century, passed into a

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SRINAGAR.

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boiled-down version for children in the Moral Tale Epoch (under George III.), and so was handed to Peter Parley when Victoria was young, to become an accepted article of nursery faith. It is not unlikely that Barrie assimilated it in the early browsings in *Chatterbox* to which he has confessed.¹ That kind of sequence is the history of many traditional verities. But it was not details like these which lifted the play above the plane of inspired exuberance, high though that level is. It was other qualities, new to the stage, which hitherto Barrie alone has shown. One is the capacity for sheer simplicity. Barrie tells you more by what he leaves out than by what he says, as in the reticent wistfulness, the sad almost silent grace, of Mrs Darling's mother-love and Peter's ineffectual flutterings against the shut window. Another is the translation of happy visions into a spiritual truth which

¹ I am informed by the editor that it appears there again (through some inadvertence of his) in the 1928 volume, but that the dismayed animal has now become an unusually large tiger.

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is almost fact. Peter could never grow up. He did not wish it? I wonder would he have grown up if by doing so he could have found a Mrs Darling? But he must flicker off into the Land of Lost Children, where imaginary heroisms come true. "Fetch me that doodle-do!" bellows Hook: and when panic fear falls upon that black soul, "What are you?" he asks. "I am youth, I am joy, I am life. . . ." That triumphant shout is the war-cry of Fairyland, with which he must lead the Lost Children. He, poor happy exile, does not know that it is needed also on the earth to which he guides them back. He hardly knows, perhaps, how tremendous a thing it is for him, an immortal, to contemplate death, though he is ready to do it. Even to mortals "to die would be an awfully big adventure."

Again, there is the almost impudent use of the audience as an accomplice—a conspirator, not in realities, but in things of the imagination, as in the snatching of Tinker Bell from death. "Do you believe? If you believe, clap your hands. A fairy can never

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die if you believe in him." (Which is the philosophy of Bishop Berkeley in English instead of Latin.) The roar of applause, it may be thought, has by now become mechanical. There are always fools in an audience who have seen a play before and giggle or clap too soon. That is where the silent book beats the spoken play. But when the appeal first came, there was a second's pause, and then the young in all sincerity, the old both because they too were rapt and because they perceived a superb stage trick, broke into thunder genuine and entirely spontaneous. They *did* believe. Afterwards, when they thought it over, the older persons realized that they had been cheering a plain truth to which they had seldom given conscious attention.

That—the perception, the communication, of some magic that lies beyond the dust of existence, something east of the sun and west of the moon—was the "lesson" or "message" of *Peter Pan*. But a feat of imagination is not planned like a twopenny tract. An artist may see in his mind such

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and such people or events, which perhaps come to life at first in a valley of dry intellectual bones, but they soon run away with him. He has no need to sort them out and label them. The Duchess in *Alice*, a strong-minded woman of sound common-sense, was aware of this truth. She saw many surprising happenings, but imputed no purpose to them: the moral came after the events, and did not always fit. Only inferior works of art go out labelled in advance.

Likewise it is silly to docket Peter himself. You might as well ask a mother to define her baby, or (as some have done) turn *The Hunting of the Snark* into an allegory. Mankind has known many Pans—for the name, being interpreted, means Everything. The Greek Pan, the goat-footed god, died to the sound of a great moaning heard by ships at sea, when Christ was crucified. Some, like Mr Arthur Machen, pretend that he yet lives, the spirit of all that is black and evil in the old earth, visible sometimes in dark Celtic hills and forests; or he may

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be fantastically unknown, unseen, as in Barrie's own *Mary Rose*. Others, like Shelley, make him a teeming god of fullness, growth, ecstasy, or send him piping down the vale of Mænalus. Yet others again, as Mr Kenneth Grahame in *The Wind in the Willows*, would have him "the Friend and Helper" of all good beasts. Peter, if you *must* "moralize the fable," may have some of the best qualities in these several modes of god, with the addition of vivid attributes known to us from the Barrie revelation. It is immaterial. The main thing is to know laughter and tears through him and with him, and be thankful for both.

Two other plays caused some critics to affirm that Barrie was a martyr to sentimentality, and that moreover he had found the child-mind an obsession. Since, with all his weaknesses, he obviously understands it, that would not be a complete disaster. The plays are *Pantaloon* (produced in 1905), and *A Kiss for Cinderella* (1916). In these, it was said, sentiment ran riot, and in *Cinderella*

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the mastery of construction which it seemed had been fully grasped was lost.

Pantaloon was written for Pauline Chase, the god-daughter of Barrie and Ellen Terry. Frohman had discovered her in America, and she grew up from a twin into a Peter Pan, when of course growth should have ceased. But she looked very lovely as Columbine, who, though maybe older than Peter, also cannot really grow old. The play is of the neglect of Pantaloon's family. "Columbine's baby"—to borrow from a leading article in *The Times* which quoted Barrie on the centenary of Grimaldi's retirement—"is a clown; and grandpapa clown is nothing but a great baby." The printed version of the play supplies between the lines just what, to some of the audience, never became clear in the spoken words. Perhaps the conventional uniform was too much for conventional minds. They had not, in the theatre, the advantage of this explanation of Harlequin's dress:

"In the far-back days, when the world was so young that the pieces of the original

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egg-shell still adhered to it, one boy was so desperately poor that he alone of children could not don fancy dress on fair days. Presently the other children were sorry for this drab one, so each of them clipped a little bit off his dress and gave it to him."

"These glittering tear-drops"—*The Times* once more—have fallen on evil days. The "stage direction" about their position could have been written by no one but Barrie; but only a cynic would not be glad to have written it:

"Now they are vanished from the boards; or at best they wander through the canvas streets, in everybody's way, at heart afraid of their own policeman, really dead, and waiting, like the faithful old horse, for some one to push them over. Here at the theatre is perhaps a scrap of Columbine's skirt, torn off as she squeezed through the wings for the last time, or even placed there intentionally by her as a souvenir: Columbine to her public, a kiss hanging on a nail."

These are long quotations from a single short play. But such extracts are a better

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defence than reason or argument against the charge of sentiment, which is really a matter of degree, of immediate personal apprehension.

About a century and a quarter ago, good Mrs Sarah Trimmer, posing as *The Guardian of Education*, in the interests of the Established Church of England, was mortified to remember that she had been brought up on Perrault's *Contes de ma mère l'Oie*. She was aghast to recollect that she could find no moral in *Cinderella* at all. One of her correspondents went even further—" *Cinderella* is perhaps one of the most exceptionable books that was ever written for children. It paints the worst passions that can enter into the human heart, such as . . . vanity, a love of dress, etc., etc." (Several other passions precede vanity: we are left to imagine what has been left out to be covered by "etc., etc.")

Poor little Cinderella! But Barrie knew she was alive, unsuppressed, and what, if she were a London waif turned princess, her passions would be. He makes her one

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of his Wendyish "little mothers," with a nursery full of war orphans of various nationalities. The children are slung in packing-case cradles from hooks and staples in various parts of the room—a device already introduced into *The Little Minister*. The play, however, whether that detail be truly from Kirriemuir or not, is certainly very sentimental, and has a distinct thinness of plot and characterization. The joy of Cinderella's ball, to most spectators' thinking, is spoilt by the fact that the fairy godmother wears Red Cross uniform. The piece came out in the middle of the War, and Cinderella was thus enabled to half-perish of cold and exhaustion on a doorstep and wake up in hospital, in order to dream of the most sublime ball ever conceived by a child starved of romance and splendour; a ball peopled with playing-card kings and queens, "royal hurdy-gurdies," and a wild, pathetic jumble of fantastically glorified London facts.

Barrie had warrant of true scripture for the ballroom extravagances which some

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critics found either tedious or silly. He showed not only what a child might dream in visions of unrealized earthly glory, but what a child actually did dream. When he wrote a preface to Miss Daisy Ashford's *The Young Visitors* (1919), the book itself was thought to be one of his jokes: he must have invented the whole thing. "In a way, it's a sort of compliment," as Smee said on another occasion. There is no doubt whatever that Miss Ashford did really compose this great romance at a very tender age. She, and she only, was present at the superb reception held by (dare we say) King Edward VII. as Prince of Wales, at which

"the prime minister and the admirals etc were eating ices and talking passionately about the laws in a low undertone."

She had seen all manner of worldly things and transmuted them almost exactly as Cinderella glorified her meagre glimpses of pomp and circumstance and (most awful of all) social convention. Barrie knew, without

the aid of this document from life, all a child's voracity of knowledge of the way to behave, her yearning for the illimitable glitter of the adult world, her eager certainty of correctness in the few glories seen by an unexercised, unbreathed mind. Those are true and universal passions: doubtless among the worst that can enter into the human heart, but omnipresent all the same.

But there was more than that in his use of this truth. You had only to compare the acted version of *The Young Visitors* with that of the ballroom scene in *Cinderella* to realize the difference between imagined fact and pure imagination. Over *The Young Visitors*, in its all too brief run as a play, you had to laugh and laugh and laugh. Honest laughter is, of course, a strong and sudden physical reaction to mental stimulus—a sudden madness rather than Hobbes's sudden glory. But at *Cinderella*, over almost the same external show, your laughter was a wound to your heart, and you could not stanch it nor deaden the pain: there was little outward reaction.

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Except for the two works treated in the next chapter, the list of Barrie's longer plays which are important enough for detailed comment ends here. Three others of fairly ambitious scope should be briefly mentioned. *The Wedding Guest* (produced in 1900, printed as a supplement to a leading monthly, but neither revived nor separately printed) was a melodrama about a discarded mistress who turned up inconveniently at a wedding. It is competently written, and had a fair reception, but is not a living piece of its author's soul. *The Adored One* (1913) is an unhappy example of the work of a Barrie who now and then does not know the border-line between humour and facetiousness. It was a failure, even when rewritten: its heroine, Leonora, turned up again, not much more successfully, in *Seven Women* (1917). *Rosy Rapture* (1915), a revue written for Mdlle Gaby Deslys, fitted her and she it; but neither had much value for the English stage.

There remain the short one-act plays.

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They are exasperatingly unequal. Those which dealt with the War or its spirit are the least satisfactory, though there are good ideas in them. For instance, the theme of *The Old Lady Shows Her Medals* (1917) ought to have suited its inventor perfectly. It is about a charwoman who has no son or relation at the Front from whom she can receive letters for her greater glory. She borrows a "lonely soldier" from a list of names, and by an outrageous coincidence its real owner turns up accidentally on leave. Unhappily, the old lady never seems at all like a real London "char," and the adventitious Kenneth is not much more like a real Tommy or Jock. Three other such plays, *The New Word*, *Barbara's Wedding*, *A Well-Remembered Voice*, deal respectively with father-and-son shyness, the contrast between young and old, and pure war-time sentimentality. They have not survived their occasion. Still less has life remained with *Der Tag* (1914), a rather ponderous attempt to put "an Emperor" on the stage, with some of the solemn but plati-

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tudinous thoughts so frequently uttered between 4th August 1914 and, say, 31st December of that year.

An earlier series was contained in a triple bill of 1905. One of the three items was *Pantaloon*, already mentioned. *Punch* was in a way a pleasant little tragedy about similar characters, light but agreeable, and freakish in a good Barrie manner. The third playlet was *Josephine*, which, being a Tariff Reform skit, highly diverting to Free Traders, has not outlived Joseph Chamberlain.

The volume of printed plays called *Half-Hours* contains some of Barrie's best work in this manner: *Rosalind* (produced in 1912), a youth-and-age comedy about a middle-aged actress and an Oxford admirer who thought her young: *The Will* (1912), a serious little study of the effect of passing years on hopes and humble ambitions that in the beginning were simple and generous; and the *Twelve Pound Look*, a delightful comedy, verging on farce, but not devoid of pathos. It has a glorious *double entendre* for its ending. This play and *The Will* have

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much of permanency in them, and all these three are good examples of Barrie's inimitable blend of technical skill and whimsical humanity.

Shakespeare's Legacy (1916) was in one sense a war play, for it was written in aid of the fund for Y.W.C.A. hostels, canteens and other enterprises. It is a mere *jeu d'esprit*, with some funny, rather than witty, fancies here and there. It appears that Shakespeare was really a Scot, which explains why he left only his second-best bed to Ann Hathaway: his best naturally went to his native village of Glen Drumly. It seems also that Lady Bacon really wrote his plays. The trifle was printed in a limited edition by the late C. K. Shorter, and this has lately become a book-collector's prize: a typescript draft, with MS. notes, was sold in 1928 for £130.¹

¹ Since these words and the reference (p. 9) to *The Book of Broadway Cricket* were written, "Barries" have gone up in the book market. A presentation copy of *Tommy and Grizel* fetched £160 at auction in August 1928.

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There remains one other puzzling short work—*Shall we Join the Ladies?* It was produced at the opening of the Royal Dramatic Academy's Theatre,¹ with an "all-star" cast, and also later. It was printed in a miscellaneous collection of "stories of murder and mystery," compiled by Lady Cynthia Asquith, called *The Black Cap* (1927). It is there described as "an uncomfortable play." It is. That is to say, the persons in it are all but one thoroughly uncomfortable. The comfortable one is Sam Smith, the host of a house party which discovers that it is about to sit down thirteen at table. This is rectified by the temporary inclusion of Dolphin, the butler, who resembles Matey in *Dear Brutus* rather as Sam Smith resembles Lob. No sooner is this trouble over than the host announces the reason why he has collected his strange assortment of guests. His brother had been murdered some time before, with no trace of the murderer; but Smith had followed slight clues and had eliminated all possible

¹ In 1921; at the St Martin's in 1922.

criminals except his twelve guests. One of them is guilty : which ? He tells them he has laid many little domestic and conversational traps for them during their visit, and one by one they show that they have each fallen into the traps. The verdict is to be delivered when the men "join the ladies." They are about to do so when there is a loud scream, and a grim scene of chaos. Curtain.

It has been asked why Barrie never completed this amazingly deft and exciting scene—why he never proceeded from so promising an opening to the full length of a moving drama—serious comedy, even tragedy, as it might become. It is permissible to doubt if such an end is desirable, if it were ever really contemplated. The "act" is a perfect little Grand Guignol mystery play as it stands. It leaves the reader or hearer tense, horrified, and—not bewildered, but faced by a fascinatingly insoluble riddle. It is as complete, as a purposeful riddle, as that amusing tale of "the Nineties," the late Frank Stockton's *The Lady or the Tiger?* — though it is

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infinitely more subtle. It is a pity that it has not been seen more often as a one-act play : it would set many audiences guessing interminably—a most happy condition of liveliness.

V

“ THOU, LOB OF SPIRITS ”

THE Never Never Land is a dream within the reach of most of us. Wonderland is always close, peopled with the images that our waking eyes and ears have planted in our half-conscious mind, in order that they should grow, and be glorified into the perfect shapes of fantasy that live only when sight and sound are still. All the folk of that country, as of Wonderland and Looking Glass Land, of the regions at the back of the North Wind or among the trees of the Tapestry Room, are airy projections of experience made quick by desire. It was another kind of Never Never Land that *Dear Brutus* explored — a Land of Never Again, not of Never-has-been-but-is-really-there. In Peter Pan's kingdom we are only ourselves more gloriously seen. In the country of Lob's enchanted wood we are might-have-

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beens who can no longer dream of a future or escape through magic casements.

There is something evil in that land from which Birnam Wood came up to the very windows of Lob's uncanny house. By some spell, of which no one but Barrie has the secret, the power of the green glooms is almost visible in the canvas and battens and spot-lights of the stage. There is a faint flicker of the same force in Burne-Jones's intricate picture of the Sleeping Beauty. But remember that the true title of that eternal story is not *The Sleeping Beauty*. It is *La Belle au Bois Dormant*—not *dormante*. The wood sleeps, like the Red King: you and the Beauty are but its dreams. When it wakes up you are not there. You are in “real” life—if that be “real” which is but frustration, self-made impotence; you are just in to-morrow and to-morrow and to-morrow. You had been alive while the wood dreamed happiness into you. Now you are dead, because the wood has gone. It had conspired with the flowers, with “our two chief characters—

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Darkness and Light"—to give you a soul, to kindle a brief candle of its own Light before it gave you back to the darkness of our ordinary world ; as cruel a use of magic as the vilest of all the legendary Pans could conceive, because once you really had a soul, and you might have been what the wood told you ; and, what is more bitter, the wood has laid bare to you the reason why you only might have been :

“ The fault, dear Brutus, is not in our stars,
But in ourselves, that we are underlings.”

But in the depths of your being you knew that already.

Lob, the host of your desirable country residence, being in the confidence of the wood, knows this terrible secret. It may even be that he commands the wood, at any rate when he is at the height of his malicious power. At other times, maybe, he is but Lob-lie-by-the-Fire, doing privy kindnesses to those who are genial to him, making the milk come effortlessly, and the cider work ; or, if a spark of ancient mischief

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flare up in him for a moment, bidding the cow kick over the milk-pail, tickling the ploughman's nostril with a straw (an exquisitely futile torment), doing all manner of silly pranks. But just as, at the other turn of the year, a different magic reigns, and on Christmas Eve no planets strike and the bird of dawning sings all night long, so on Midsummer Night's Eve the empery of the old pagan world comes back and Lob holds strong sway. He never changes: “they do say in the village that they remember him seventy years ago, looking just as he does to-day.”

“He says he is all that is left of Merry England: that little man”—so Matey, the thieving butler, mysterious victim-accomplice of Lob, tells the inquisitive ladies, who remember that Lob was Puck, and Puck, Robin Goodfellow. And he warns them of an undefined danger, now imminent.

Consider in brief the alien guests in this bewitched corner of immemorial England. There are the pleasant, easy-going Mr and Mrs Coady—a second wife for whom the

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amiable Coady is for ever " nudging himself to little offices " that he had learnt to perform for her forerunner. When he is not doing that he is pretending to create a Great Work. There are Mr and Mrs Dearth—he a drunkard, an artist who was once to be great, a failure whose vital spark, not wholly drowned even now, is soaked in brandy ; she disillusioned, yet feeling sometimes the dimmest prick of old hopes. There are Purdie, a self-sufficient young Oxford man, and Joanna Trout, a bright young thing, rather too bright for the peace of others, and Mrs Purdie, " soft and pleading." And there is Lady Caroline Laney, lately from an " enormously select school " : for her the wood has in store a very singular revelation.

They " are all quite nice people," they agree, when they come back from the wood. But till they have been there they do not realize that they are governed by " something that makes us go on doing the same sort of fool things, however many chances we get." Only Dearth is beyond self-

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deception : his insight into himself is almost always with him, such being the grim clarity that alcohol gives, but will not allow to take effect in the breaking of its power.

It is in the conversation between Dearth and his wife, before the wood suddenly appears close to the garden windows, and in the contrast with the younger Dearth happily painting with his daughter for companion, that Barrie's mastery reaches a supreme height. Here is a writer, a poet, greater than he who flew into “ far-off shrines in distant lands ” with Peter Pan for guide ; greater than he who put pitiful laughter between Grizel and Thomas Sandys. He is poised between the abysmal failure of mankind and its sublimest imaginary hopes.

Even if writing a story or a philosophical book were an easy thing, which is not at all the case, it would seem insuperably difficult to quicken such fantasy into reality on the stage. Barrie describes delicately in his narrative-dialogue book of the play the general atmosphere of brooding magic and its effect on the persons concerned. But he

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creates it behind the footlights, not only by little tricks of acting, but by his amazing use of the right words and the unerring rhythm (in their relation to one another) of the spoken sentences. Here is stagecraft whose art is so perfect as to be invisible.

It is impossible to describe even in outline the heart-breaking return of the voyagers into the might-have-been. It is done gradually yet swiftly, in a proper sequence of entries that are inevitable but as easy as the run of a stream over smooth stones. I leave to those who like to hunt for messages the final words :

MATEY. I have given your egg six minutes, ma'am.

(They set forth once more upon the eternal round. The curious JOANNA remains behind.)

JOANNA. A strange experiment, Matey ; does it ever have any permanent effect ?

MATEY *(on whom it has had none)*. So far as I know, not often, miss ; but, I believe, once in a while. *He* could tell you.

Lob “kicks responsively,” the wicked all-knowing little conjurer. You can find

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sermons as many as you like in these stones, adorn the tale with a dozen different morals. It is better to be content that *mentem mortalia tangunt*: we cannot really explain why human hearts are touched by human things, so that we laugh or cry, or both, when Barrie bids us in such strange sort.

There is magic in *Mary Rose*, and the same other-world power of using it, with the same peculiar gift of translating it into action within a three-walled room. *Dear Brutus* is a tragi-comedy of this daily life. We all know what we hope and how we fail. *Mary Rose* is concerned with what we do not know, perhaps never can know: the impalpable something beyond the horizon of forlorn and empty seas, the secular fear of the unknown that once gave strange gods to the youth of the world. To no race were those gods nearer than to that which we call Celtic. They are far other than those of our own which survive in our English folk-lore. Lob was a human spirit, a friend or a plague of simple folk, and his realm was not far away from meadows and farmyards

and warm red hearths. But if you came into the sovrantry of the Little Folk, the people of the Hebrides or the Aran Isles or Connemara, you might find yourself in kingdoms bleak and soulless and foreign. You might wander there by accident, coming under a doom by some unconscious fault, as Englishmen will unwittingly pollute an Eastern shrine through blunt ignorance. Or you might seek the old gods deliberately, as by running widdershins round a church and being no more seen. However you came into that land, you were fast holden till its princes set you free. And you returned not knowing where you had been, nor indeed that you had absented yourself at all from our commonplace felicity.

It would seem impossible to make a play out of that primal faith, unless, of course, you put on a pretence as of a kind story-telling nurse, and labelled it in large letters, "Fairy," or, if you would be a preacher, "Allegory." Even so, you might even have to drag in the aid of costume, and adventitious properties like bird-whistles and blue

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fire and perhaps wings that as a matter of physical posture would not permit even elves to fly. But consider Mr Amy, the clergyman :

“He likes to read a book if he knows the residence or a relative of the author, and at the play it is far more to him to learn that the actress has three children, one of them down with measles, than to follow her histrionic genius.”

What is he doing here, in a play about a young mother vanishing in a distant isle of the Hebrides—“the Island that likes to be Visited” ?

You might as well ask why put in a stage direction like that. It *must* be impossible to convey by speech such a vivid little character sketch. And the words quoted are not in the play itself : they are only part of the printed book. Yet in the theatre, somehow, Mr Amy has to convey the sense of the words—and does convey it, perfectly. Barrie is completely master of that magic which can turn one language veritably

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into another. And he is no less master of that almost terrifying skill which can give visibility to the vaguest fabric of the mind.

There are no stage tricks—no Birnam Woods—in *Mary Rose*. They are not necessary. It is the brain, not its sensory organs, which has to be hypnotized. It is not incongruous to meet the vicar, or to see a post-war Australian finding in a stage-house rooms which are not there. They are as much creatures of suggestion as the hidden force that takes *Mary Rose* away; or, to put it conversely, the vague unseen power is as fully present as they. The noise of grasshoppers to indicate leprechauns in *John Bull's Other Island* is as solid as a Drury Lane fairy in green tights beside the nebulous strength of things not seen in *Mary Rose*. You do not know, you are not told, where *Mary Rose* has been, nor where Harry, nor why. But you are bound to believe that some other world has contained them, and to believe it exists in some dimension of which, maybe, the foam that

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shines and is gone on the rocks of the Isles is faintly trying to warn us. You do not see the foam either, nor hear it lapping with low sounds by the shore. But you feel it when the islander speaks, and when there is emptiness where a few moments before was a living person.

The islander does not use the Doric of Thrums, but the graver, more stately tongue of the Outer Isles (if a mere Englishman may judge of what he knows only from the written word of Northern scholars). That, and the recourse to an elfland hitherto not visited in print or word by him, are a new thing in the exhibition of Barrie's genius. So was the use for serious purposes of Lob's wood. Neither comes from the, so to speak, known Barrie. So far he had employed, with a strong and impressive Scottish touch in detail and colour, something like our common un-national experience and (for those who have it in more or less degree) our common imagination. In these two plays there is something at once more fundamental and more individual : there is

a person showing us the secret unspoken lore of a race. I am not foolish enough to trouble about the ætiology of what for convenience we call the Celtic mind, nor about this or that stock, breed, blood, strain (any catchword will do). But it is a fact that conversance with primitive beliefs of the kind found in *Dear Brutus* and *Mary Rose* is more common in people born of old Scottish and Irish lineage than in other folk of these isles. Barrie, a Scot, playing with angels that haunt Englishmen as well as Scots, here draws up, from racial depths as yet unplumbed by him for public use, a quite different sort of angel: blacker, perhaps, more malevolent; certainly more disturbing, for the earlier species had left you happy, if a little sad, and these stir a wonder, a kind of awe, a fear that human nature is not of the same simple profundity as before, but of a more shattering incomprehensibility.

Is it playing with the supernatural? But the supernatural, when you put it down on paper, is only an unexplained extension of

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our natural personality. It is not her own personality that Mary Rose finds in her time alone with (to us) nothingness : it is, it must be, something else. Or is Barrie just playing with moonshine ? If so, it is the moonshine that gave rise to the word lunatic—the moonshine that can show you Puck as well as Titania, and (in the fables of science) draw the tides, and drive you mad.

Mary Rose vanishes, the boy Harry vanishes ; they come back. They have but vague knowledge of even what they expected to find in the old familiar world. There is not very much more in the articulation of the plot's skeleton than that. There is nothing so definite as in *Dear Brutus*. In that technical sense, *Mary Rose* is a less complete play. But it is even higher in suggestiveness, and both are higher than any work done by any living dramatist in an attempt to touch, to put clothes of silk and wool and linen upon, the intangible. *Outward Bound*, G. K. Chesterton's *Magic* are among such attempts : good, for they

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wake one from dogmatic slumbers, but not supreme as Barrie's, for after a time darkness and the coma of those slumbers come back, and you do not remember that "perhaps the wood may prove to have been useful after all."

Or must we turn moralist and seek a purpose in this new Barrie? I hope not, because eventually it would be hard even for Humpty Dumpty, with all his dominion over words, to phrase the moral otherwise than as a recovered platitude newly clad. When a platitude is rediscovered, all that has happened is that Truth has bobbed up again from a well round which a debating society has been sitting, and we have had hurriedly to cover her nakedness with clothes freshly turned by the dyer and cleaner. But "the Emperor has no clothes," cried Hans Andersen's child. Neither have we in the land which Barrie sees.

So far have we come: all the way from a window in Thrums to a midsummer night's dream and the lonely edge of the

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Ocean of lost Atlantis. There is nothing quite like such a progress in modern English letters, nor indeed in our literature at all. In these last two plays—whether or not he yet adds to them or even enters new worlds at which we cannot guess—Barrie has reached a measure of full stature. Perhaps he has really grown up. But there is something of the earliest Barrie whose dreams first came to him in a little Scottish village, in all he has written, even when he is peering between the interstices of the stars.

VII

WHICH IS BARRIE ?

“**N**O one so obscure nowadays” (to quote *Courage* for the last time) “but that he can have a book about him.” There have been several about James Matthew Barrie, and there will be more, both in his lifetime and in many years to come, when his books alone survive and he is embalmed or anatomized in the *Dictionary of National Biography*.

The title of that great work brings us up short against one fact about him which has been taken for granted. He is national, even international, for English-speaking America clamours for him, and already his work has passed into other tongues. Setting out from an obscure Scottish village, unfriended, almost self-taught (every Scot somehow gets a good education, but usually by his own efforts), he has walked through the wilderness of this world, so searchingly

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that he can tell us more about it than we can ever learn of ourselves. But do we even now know how or why he can thus speak to us ?

He has called himself two men — M'Connachie and the family solicitor — and I have said he is several. It may even be that the whole of Henley's description of Stevenson does apply equally to Barrie, if you add that Stevenson (except in some smaller sort in his poetry) never learnt the utter joy of flying, as Barrie and Peter Pan learnt it, nor saw so far "beyond the baths of all the western stars" — far beyond the misty island in the Hebrides which is hidden in the soul of Scots exiles all over the world. "You cannot wall in the free soul." If you turn Barrie into a London journalist, he will not be one in heart : he will beat against the walls till he is at large with the weapons of a learnt trade added unto him.

The trade, no doubt, clung to him, and often marred the clearness and liberty of his flight. It is a cocksure thing, this journalism. When you have been at it for a time,

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you know surely enough whether your manner is good or bad, accomplished or defective. But you may quite well be ignorant whether your matter be sublime or silly. Through that danger Barrie eventually passed to the mastery shown in the two plays just explored. But it was never certain till they appeared that the imp of journalism would not spoil romance by a crude or even silly cross-heading. In the end, however, Barrie has given that portion of him wings, which journalists seldom have.

I have dwelt upon that professional evolution rather heavily, because it seems to me to explain a great deal of what I should have liked to discover: how a man of genius renders the highest work of that genius communicable. Barrie tried many modes of speech: essays, plays, tales, novels, oratory. A little of him spoke out in every kind. But only twice or thrice could you say hopefully, almost with conviction, this is Barrie, not Barrie with a conjurer and incidental music, not a marvelously gifted entertainer who sometimes

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makes you gasp and sometimes is just giving you patter.

He is sure of life, as books go. He has touched our ordinary humanity too firmly to leave no impress. He began as eminent in a "fashion" of the moment, with rivals, imitators, parodists. You cannot imitate or parody *Dear Brutus*, nor invent a new Peter Pan. You cannot even improve on the technique of *The Admirable Crichton*. Nor can you, except by his own gifts which you cannot possess, be so honestly loved as he, this hidden impersonal writer whose sombre humorous eyes seem always to be looking into your soul, laughing at you and with you, persuading you of any absurdity, any sorrow.

He wrote wonderfully of his friend Meredith in that unsigned article that appeared in the old green evening *Westminster Gazette* (it was reprinted separately in 1909). He saw the illustrious dead expecting their peer, for "when a great man dies, the immortals await him at the top of the nearest hill." When Barrie goes

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as Meredith went, it will not only be great men who stand there. Who will attend him? Margaret Ogilvy will be there, for sure; but she will wait to be alone with her son. Who else? "The people I have cared for most and who have seemed most worth caring for have been very simple folk." They too will be there along with the great ones, and many others. Stern elders, in whom sternness has long ago become serenity, will be of the company; mothers with troops of happy children; the fighters of life who were heartened by the brave words of a wise and kindly man; cricketers (doubtless on Broad Ha'penny) who, after their wont, will stop their eternally happy game for a moment and look over the gate silently as he passes; his fellows in the writing craft who must have loved his ease while they envied; a score of players who gave their voices to his words and trod his enchanted woods; and those few close friends who had in life the glory of knowing all the Barries at once. Very likely John Bunyan and Charles

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Lamb will be his sponsors when he comes to take his seat in the Parliament of the Dead, on the other side ; and Samuel Johnson, LL.D., the Speaker of that House, will be just to him, because, for all that he was an Englishman, he was a citizen of the world and had no hatred but of such shams as James Barrie could never put forth.

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